

**STATEMENT OF FRAN P. MAINELLA, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,  
RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES CONCERNING  
CHRISTIANSTED NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, BUCK ISLAND REEF NATIONAL  
MONUMENT, AND SALT RIVER BAY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND ECOLOGICAL  
PRESERVE.**

**July 22, 2002**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your subcommittee at this oversight field hearing on Christiansted National Historic Site, Buck Island Reef National Monument, and Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. I am accompanied by Joel A. Tutein, superintendent of these three units.

We appreciate having the opportunity to learn more about the national park units here and to discuss the various issues associated with the St. Croix national park units, as we did two days ago with the St. John national park units. My statement will focus on the expansion of Buck Island Reef National Monument that occurred in 2001, the potential expansion of Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve, and an update on the planning process that will set forth future management goals.

Buck Island Reef National Monument was established by Presidential proclamation in 1961 to preserve one of the finest marine gardens in the Caribbean Sea. Located one and a half miles off of St. Croix, it has become the number one destination for visitors to St. Croix. The 176-acre island and surrounding coral reef ecosystem support a large variety of native flora and fauna, and provide haven to several endangered and threatened species, including the hawksbill sea turtle and the brown pelican.

Buck Island Reef National Monument was significantly expanded on January 17, 2001, by proclamation of President Clinton under the Antiquities Act. The proclamation added 18,135 acres of submerged lands to the monument, bringing the total acreage to just over 19,000 acres, all of which consist of submerged lands except for the 176-acre Buck Island. It eliminated all extractive uses, prohibited boat anchoring except by

permit, and directed commencement of the planning process that will set forth the future management and use of the monument.

Since the designation of the expanded Buck Island Reef National Monument last year representatives of the Virgin Islands government have raised numerous questions and concerns. In fact, on April 9, 2001, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands passed a resolution (No. 1609), expressing concern over the lack of adequate public participation in expansion of the monument, ownership of the submerged lands, the size of the monument, and potential impacts on the fishing and marine industries. I would like to briefly address those concerns.

While we share concerns about the way in which these monuments were created, our job now is to ensure that we develop management plans in an open, inclusive, and comprehensive way. As stated by Secretary Norton on numerous occasions, the planning for the future management of these monuments will be a model of what we call the four C's: *Consultation, Cooperation, and Communication, all in the service of Conservation*. The Department of the Interior is committed to management and protection of the monuments consistent with the four C's and the purposes established in the proclamations. In response to this commitment, we published a notice in the Federal Register on April 24, 2002, initiating a formal scoping period seeking public comment to identify issues to consider and analyze regarding management at the monument designations in the western states. The Department is currently reviewing the public comments. After reviewing all the comments on each monument, I believe most of the issues can be addressed through the management planning process, which will also include comprehensive public input. With regard to the monuments we are discussing today, we anticipate a similar public review process as soon as the issue of submerged lands ownership is resolved.

We agree that federal ownership or control of the land is necessary for an area to be designated as a national monument under the Antiquities Act. The General Accounting Office (GAO), at the request of

Delegate Christian-Christensen, has reviewed the question of federal ownership or control of the submerged lands in the expansion of Buck Island Reef National Monument. We understand that GAO will issue its opinion shortly.

As to the size of Buck Island Reef National Monument, the Clinton Administration determined that an additional 18,135 acres was the smallest area needed to ensure the proper care and management of the resources to be protected and their long-term sustainability. The expansion area is large enough to provide a fish nursery that, in theory, should help assure that fishing will remain viable as an industry and a recreational activity here.

With regard to the impact to the fishing and marine industries, although the loss of fishing territory could have an impact on the industry, we believe that it should be offset by the regeneration of stocks of fish that occur from the enhancement of the fish nurseries made possible by the expansion.

The expanded Buck Island Reef National Monument should help provide for a recovery of coral reefs and associated habitats, facilitate an increase in the abundance of reef fish, sustain commercial and recreational fishing outside the monument, and enhance

snorkeling and diving opportunities, which should contribute to economic growth from tourism. As with the Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument, the biological communities of the Buck Island Reef National Monument comprise a fragile, interdependent environment consisting of such habitats as coral reefs, sea grass beds, sand communities, algal plains and mangroves that are essential for sustaining and enhancing the tropical marine ecosystem.

Just as the marine ecosystem around St. John is under chronic stress, so too is the ecosystem around Buck Island. Damage has been caused over the years from a variety of both natural forces and human activities.

The ecosystem has been affected by hurricanes, diseases of various kinds, and coral predators. Years of coral diseases such as the White Band and Black Band disease, coral bleaching, and other coral predators have adversely affected the reef. Activities that contribute to the degradation of these marine resources include improper fishing, boating, and diving practices.

Research over a long period of time has provided evidence that fish are not only smaller than in the past, but also that there has been a serial depletion of certain species, including the commercial extinction of the Red and Mutton Snappers, Nassau Grouper, Triggerfish (oldwife), and Rainbow and Midnight Parrotfish.

Tourism is the mainstay of the economy here, and the national park units on both St. Croix and St. John contribute significantly to the tourism revenues generated on those islands. By implementing a collaborative approach to long-term management and protection for the spectacular resources managed by the National Park Service which lures tourists to the Virgin Islands, the monument designations provide an important way to help improve and sustain the Virgin Islands' economy. As stated earlier, the National Park Service has been preparing to undertake the planning process that will set forth the

future management and use of the expanded monument, and we look forward to working collaboratively with the territorial government, our gateway communities, and other interested stakeholders in this endeavor.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to discuss Salt River Bay National Historical Park and Ecological Preserve. The park was established by Congress in 1992 to preserve and protect Salt River Bay's outstanding cultural and natural resources, to interpret the significance and value of those resources to the public, and to encourage scientific research. Consisting of 946 acres, the park contains some of the most important archaeological sites in the Virgin Islands, and has been designated a National Historic Landmark and National Natural Landmark.

Since as early as 1880, Salt River Bay has been the focus of major archaeological investigations. The area was inhabited by the three major pre-Columbian pottery-making cultures in the Virgin Islands: the Igneri (AD 50-650), Taino (AD 650-1425), and Kalima or Carib (AD 1425-1590). During his second voyage to the New World, Columbus sent soldiers ashore at Salt River Bay to search for fresh water and to make contact with natives. Beginning in the mid-1600's, there were successive attempts to colonize the island by the Dutch, English, French, French chapter of the Knights of Malta, and Danes. The site includes Fort Salé, an earthwork fortification from the Dutch period of occupation.

The enabling legislation calls for Salt River Bay to be managed jointly by the National Park Service and the Government of the Virgin Islands. Management Objectives (1994) and a Land Protection Plan (1995) were approved by both the Governor of the Virgin Islands and the National Park Service. Land purchases in the last three years have brought the total proportion of the area within the park boundary that is under government ownership to about 87 percent. However, despite success in acquiring property for the park, neither the federal government nor the territorial government has established an operational presence at Salt River Bay because we have not yet identified a suitable site for that purpose.

The Land Protection Plan identifies the waterfront as the most suitable area for establishing visitor services and most of the park's operations. However, there is no waterfront property available for that purpose at this time. Because we believe it is essential for us to establish a presence at the park, we have begun looking at sites that would serve as an initial base of operations. Recently, we have become aware of a willing seller of a parcel that includes a house large enough to serve as an interim administrative facility for the park. However, the property is partially outside the boundary of the park. Its acquisition would require boundary adjustment legislation and, of course, the appropriation of sufficient funds to acquire it. We appreciate the efforts Delegate Christian-Christensen has made toward that end, and we look forward to working with her on this matter.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about Christiansted National Historic Site, the third national park unit on St. Croix. This site, which was established in 1952, was the first unit of the National Park System in the Virgin Islands. Christiansted was the capital of the Danish West Indies during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the height of the sugar industry on St. Croix. The seven-acre site consists of the wharf area and related historic buildings as examples of the town's economy and way of life in Danish times. It contains the oldest and largest former slave-trading complex under the U.S. flag. The wharf and its connection with international trade provided the practical education of the young Alexander Hamilton. This unit is an important draw for tourists to the Virgin Islands, not only for its history but also because it is a centerpiece for historic

preservation in the territory.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. Superintendent Tutein and I will be happy to answer any questions you or your colleagues may have.